THALIA

OR A COUNTRY DAY

A MASQUE

BY JOHN FINLEY JR.

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A Country Day

A Masque

BY

JOHN FINLEY, JR.

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
1929

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The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE • MASSACHUSETTS
PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

PROLOGUE

'Twixt where by night the pastured hillside fails
And the dark brook disturbs a star in the pool,
A mist scarce stirring on a meadow still
Doth dreamlike lie and white.
Cowlèd in silence, as the night-cloud sails,
Hillside and field receive the moonbeams cool
And, while the brook that wakes below the hill
Sings in the paths of night,
Await in wondrous sleep the morning light.

Canst fancy here how, with the sun of mirth,
Will wind through humored hours the minstrelsy
Which little lives in changeful measure tell
Unto the tune of day?
For in the world's reprieve and nook of earth,
Here when grass bends, when flowers tryst the gold bee,
The still-stepped morn, at passing in the dell,
Sings yet her lay
Which choiring earth and folk conjoining play.

To such light measure and to morning muse
Let dance, then, hearts, the harmony attending,
Weave with the hours the patterned morris-turn
Of country grace and old.

PROLOGUE

Let so meek Dulness his distemper lose
In the wood's step and music idly wending,
And Mirth, grown pure, to quiet hearts return,
Ere May hath told
Her tale of love and beauties never bold.

Soft, before dawn, the flitted moth doth fly,
And the owl, wakeful and blithe, on wings of night
Past the dark hill descends and many a tree
Sunken and slumbering.
The stars which, highest now, across the sky
Mount and incline their arc of blameless flight
Shine with weak fires, and lo! the bird of glee,
Risen, doth sing
Beyond the dawning hill his wakening.

THALIA
or, A Country Day:
A Masque

Female Characters:

THALIA, the Rustic Muse.
THE PORCUPINE.
THE WOODCHUCK.

Male Characters:

THE RABBIT.
THE FOX.

Characters in the Interlude:

PORPHURIO, a Magician.
ROLAND, a Countryman.
OLIVER, a Countryman.

THALIA

(*It is imagined that, on a certain day of spring, the wild creatures gather to a place in the woods to hold a yearly celebration. They each have risen early to procure some present of their choice, which they will bring to the festival. The scene is an open dell by a brook, and the time is before daylight.*)

PORCUPINE (*alone*). 'Tis heartsick practice thus to
wake the road
Through witching night. See, from yon lake in the east,
Steal yet the wan and flooding currents scarcely,
And the sky, remarkless of that pale,
In hectic majesty and the repose
Of power integral wheels to sloping west.
In my sleep there rose a phantom; in my slumber
Passing shapes of idiotic likeness
Hovered by the mind's verge, and I saw
Love's wistful visitant, this prince of days,
A prisoner to the imps of dreaming. Some say
Dreams are the future's birds, the couriers
Of shocks in queasy nature, but that's false.
For this dear day, ever the prodigal
Of all else-homely life, will lift Olympus
On our earth of thoughts, and, from an hour,

Leave gifts that dreams, night's causeless malcontents,
Scarce will reproach. — But mark, low at the east,
But there, beyond that sable slope of trees,
Dawn's oriel window lightens. Let me sit here,
While, in the field, the wings of the white mist
Stir, as the day doth grow. Let me sit here.
(*She sits down and falls asleep.*)

RABBIT (*alone*). Makst thou thy way, O wan and
strengthless moon,
So early to the trees. The Virgin star,
The damsel of the spring, is yet abroad,
And e'en frail mortals, as the night doth pass
And from the hill softly the season's breath
Blows and disturbs all the unnumbered woods,
Are sleepless for their joy. The night is weak.
The June-bug, now, within the orchard pale
Hath sought his hole of slumber, and the field,
Where fireflies were, as their brief lanterns sink,
Is quieted. I'll go no distance more.
Soon the white signs of the fresh-visaged dawn
Will show above the hill. Then I'll be gone.
(*He also falls asleep.*)

WOODCHUCK (*alone*). 'Tis early to be out. Hark.
But naught moves.
The night keeps silence, and the air is still.
Only the travelers, now, who in their sleep

Last eve saw morrow ere the midnight's passing,
Wake and with cold and hasting steps repair
The idle labor of their dreaming. Sooth,
That's but discretion, so enchoked and hoar
The mist winds by the brook, and yonder meadow
Wears so white a cloak. 'Tis now life's pulse,
Yet sullen from the night, seeps with dull steps
Through aching body and the loth, loth mind,
And mortals slow, eyes stung with slumber's moats,
Grope up the slopes of waking. Were't not so cold,
I'd find some nichy bank, and there this load,
All operose, of sleep enloosen. Nay,
I'll do that anyway. For dawn doth pale,
And in the east, earth's wayless passengers
Descry that longing and that promise. Where
The poplar dim doth tremble and the wind stirs,
There will I rest a moment. Then I'll be on.
Say not I'll sleep. No, no. Not sleep, not sleep.
(*She falls asleep.*)

SONG

Mark, bat, and begone.
The pale day climbs his road.
Pantried roach and croaking toad,
Be off before the dawn.

Horses attent that hear day's fumbling hush
Blow in the shadowed crib the hayseed dancing.

They stir and return; they wake and, backward glancing,
Sense at the looming door the swallow brush.

Hollow-haunting frosts that hallow
Witches' eve with rime and sallow
Blight, be gone from field and fallow.

Dire dream die and phantom sicken.
Visions webby heads that thicken,
Hence again till shadows quicken.

For now the housewife, waked ere cockcrow pale,
From tangled wits hath chased the bats of dreaming,
While, at the oven brisk and firelight gleaming,
She tends through the gray hour her viands hale.

Wake, pecking crow, and stalk
The meadow frosty in the furrow chill,
Wake, and with clamor fill
The dim, untimely earth, ere farmers walk.

(THALIA, *the rustic muse, enters. She wears a green robe and has flowers braided in her hair.*)

THALIA. 'Tis the hour's infancy. The moon doth stoop,
And dawn with present breath out of the east
Fares, like a sexton, in the aislèd day,

Loosing and opening. What slumbers now?
The wood in thickets cold that, through the night,
The flocks did keep of the many long-winged birds
Hath waked each one unto his matins sweet
And filled its groves with singing. Now, of fields
The restless farmer thinks, as, purposeful,
He gets him from his bed and at the doorway
Hears the hoarse raven passing and, beyond,
The singer shadowèd, the thrush, awake.
For lo! the earth o'er all her quiet shapes
Summons the messengers of the sightless day.
They touch the ash tree, pale beside the road,
And from the field, passing the silent barn,
Stir at the door in promise and are gone
While yet the hay doth whisper. 'Tis the hour
The worker leaves his house. The dreamed imprison-
ment
Of night is past, and morning, scarcely born,
Wears not the guise the mind doth know it in.
But it is quick, as placeless, like a ghost,
It walks by his side who fares, full cold, abroad.
'Tis not, then, that the brook, the drifted elm,
Touched with the east's unseen and mazelike rhythms,
Are not the tree, the stream he yester saw,
But that some still unclearer truth, some hint
Out of the manifold and chartless stuff
Of life that only custom enviously
Curtails to neat day's aspect doth proceed

Upon the wind of his untimely vigil.
  Meadows that tongueless lay beneath the stars,
Through the still night the paths of heaven knowing,
Yea, and these trees of tracèd paleness, live
And keep, as men, their use. And all the world
Of countless circumstance in nature's place
Seems but the skein an angel might have dreamed.
  Didst mark at eve, O man, Selena's horn
But scarce two parts encircling of that sphere
That, wan as dawn and dim as wingèd sleep,
Fulfilled the space within? As when at night
A traveler on a highroad pale hears steps
And knows not, in the time a star could lapse,
Whether another comes or goes, so thou
Mightst not have known the moon. Then couldst thou tell
The term in waxing radiance 'twould illume,
How but six suns, a week's sweet eves of stars,
And 'twould watch in the night, and in the west,
Old men that lightest sleep toward day would see it.
So brief in thought was its whole month of life.
Yet, when that's said, is it all? Ah, were the heart
A tree to answer no with every wind.
For were thoughts cold and all the glimpses ceased
Which men for their small hour below the moon
Dream 'twixt a sleep and waking, yet would sail
That sphere more fair than tongue, than life can phrase,
And, through the night, the errant fires of heaven,

These that were the life of all life's love,
Would keep what good was on the earth forever.
  But see, the creatures, warm as wintering doormice,
Dream at the sill of day, and from the east
The trouble and the sigh of waking breathes
As the wind comes. I'll go now, and they'll rise
And scold their sleep to see the lightening skies.

Song

From chimney-top so dim, say, smoke,
Whither dost fare?
The huntsman of the stars hath scarce awoke
To wind his horn of wildness in the air.

By dripping paths the chore-boy cold doth run,
Seeking his scattered kine across the hill.
His milk-pail, ringing, wakes the morning still,
Ere from the pasture's height he sees the sun.

When he finds them, they with swinging footsteps follow
Whither, by night, their vagrant bells replied.
And where the willow lisps within the hollow,
There doth he lead to lowlands green and wide.

He ties them where the daisy, wooed of snow,
Turns to the east her fringèd eye's desire.
And see, the sun above his rime of fire,
Hath touched with radiant hands the pasture low.

From chimney-top so blithe, smoke, say,
Whither in flight?
Wouldst seek beyond the margin of the day
Forsunken night?

PORCUPINE (*waking*). What is it? What sayst thou?
Nay, no one speaks.
Only the day with laughter's pleasant eyes
Shines on the hill and meadow, and the sun,
So early sought, my first expectancy,
Hath mounted while I slept. All other souls
'Tis certain are abroad. None, now, but I
Forsakes love's voice or falters as he calls.
But I, for that I matched the bird of dawn
Whose too-soon song emptied all her bright heart,
Missing the great, am mute e'en in the least,
And, like some wistful maid, who grieves and sees
Another apter love, yet love not more,
I have naught left but pain, as breathing May
Calls all the earth with voice of holiday.

RABBIT (*waking*). Hark, for the eager sparrow, clad in brown,
Sings from the bush to the awakened sky.
He sings and ceases, and the kindred notes
Of his bright tribe in answered melody
Rise with new voice, and all the countryside
Doth tell the praise of day. For April wan

Is stricken, as she wills, in her wet course,
When freshly crowned and hopeful, like a saint,
She yields to the young month her springing realm.
And not one creature looks upon the fields,
And sees their joyfulness, and thinks complaint.
For spring receives e'en them that nothing bring,
Save their glad hearts, to her in offering.

WOODCHUCK (*waking*). Say not that thou didst sleep.
Ah, but thou must.
The rat sleeps not who, silent, in the barn
Steals with Iscariot's eyes unto the grain-box
And doth eat, a shadowed banqueter, and listen.
Nothing that's ill doth sleep. Only the flowers,
The children of the sun, forsake the earth,
While in the night the toad-stool sulphurous
Begets in poison for to-morrow's plague
His twenty pricking scions. Thus it is.
The diligence of dullness, evil's wit,
Outpass us and we sleep. A curse, therefore.
For, see, the rose and violet, all untaught,
Have dressed themselves for May, but I have naught.

PORCUPINE. Look, there's some one there, when all
the world
I said had sought their business as I slept.
I'd think 'twas the woodchuck, could the time of day
But be the tailor to the needy thought

To dress it in persuasion. But 'tis not.
For she, like to the lover comfortless,
Doth daily Heos in the east salute,
And why should now she wait, and why to-day
Make her most seasonless exception? Nay,
'Tis a log or a stone. Ah, nay again. 'Tis she,
And mine is not the only heart that tarries.
There's comfort there, to be sure, and self-respect
Is cured by her companionable fault.
I'll call her and mayhap we'll learn to halt
By mutual wit the wastes of our neglect.
Good morrow, sister woodchuck. Well, the day
Shines with a prosperous eye upon our play.
When eager fire revives my itching quills,
The air is bountiful.

WOODCHUCK. So may it be.
I also step with very ready paws
Beneath the clover and the carrot wild.
My need's the inducement. See, the knave of sleep
Hath stole all sweetest leisure. Now wherein
To find that treasure vanishèd, I know not.
I seek it, and I nothing win. Ah, time.
Ah, but to be those ingots' alchemist
And to distil a treasury of minutes.
There were perfection, and my life my churl
To serve me as I wished. Knowst what I'd do?
There is a distant purlieu, where, in the woods,

Airs, all unfingered from the diseaseful world,
Through summer hours, are quiet. To that place,
In which, days through, monastic stillness is,
And the pensive earth, in ardor's surcease, dreams
Along a silent stoa visions of heaven,
I should go. And while my passing feet
Did scarce dismay that meditative circlet,
There by a brook, perchance, a-talk in the shade,
I'd find earth's matchless things and gather, then,
All that I sought, the gift of worthiness.

PORCUPINE. I too was awake, ere, in the veinèd
arbor,
Moonlight had ceased to stir among the leaves,
Ere, yea, the wall, the while a planet shone
Some little space in the east, had done its dream
Of stony quietness. 'Twas in that hour
My heart chose for this day its truest desire
And I knew my fortunatus. What I wished
I well wist where to seek, and all the joints
Of life's so loth, so unconcurrent structure
Seemed most wondrously to be knit. Ah, then,
I said I was happy, and, sooth, none than I
Had fairer prospect of this morrow. Thus
It was. I walked on the shadowed road. I paused,
And, in my pausing, sleep, straight to the work,
Did rob me of the jewel of all my hopes.
But come. The peaking hour, all but agone,

Keeps yet its little autumn. Tell me now
The gift, matched to our time and powers, the heart
Yet bids us study. Tell, and with hasted vow,
We'll drain dejection's dregs and so depart.

WOODCHUCK. O hopes appropriate and fit desire.
We will be off. For, look, the merry sun
The meadows all hath dressed in gentleness.
See, where the bee sails, there had our errand end.
She seeks the clover, ever, the morning through,
Betrafficked with that sleepy treasure. We,
Did we the same, should have sweet suffisance.
Yea, clover were all our need; yet did we see
Peas that we'd add thereto, 'twere fortune's glance.

PORCUPINE. What's that? What did you say?

WOODCHUCK. The sun, I said,
Had charmed the spreaded fields with high delight,
Sooth, and the bee had touched, and smallest birds
To seasonable rapture counselèd,
And we should give no welcome more to words,
But, as we may, gather the clover bright.

PORCUPINE. Were't not thus twice asserted, 'twere not believed.
The blowzy grass that bends on every wind
And owns no local rareness, more than a flower
We'd note as commonest, the dusted yarrow

Or the self-heal ragged with blue, is meager grace
For May, and clover is. Nay, they're too plain.
But I know where's the garden of the world.
There, where the airs do dream their hours at waltzes,
Bushes, all grace and nodding, dip and bestir
Their pretty heads to the gales, and when the day's done,
Sigh once ere they slumber. There, if we'd go,
Within that glade of motion, these would themselves
Give to our seeking hands. Then we'd rejoice.
For, say, knowst thou than bushes sweeter choice?

WOODCHUCK. Say that thou jokest. Then my world of care
Were sped at that fair waking.

PORCUPINE. Nay, not I.
The air so quick, the clouds enheaped of dream,
The green, most gentle hill where love doth lie,
Also the trees in many a spreaded choir
Where birds, the cool day through, their office tune,
All much solicit me; and I to keep
Therefrom the askèd gift, can nowise learn.
But all my hopes with opulence commune,
And all desires to bushes do return.

WOODCHUCK. No, no, it cannot be. Nay, it is false.
Say it ten times again, I'll not believe.

But ears 'tis that trick me, like the sad fool
That hears his love in the running stream. 'Twas not
That thou saidst bushes. Tell me, and I'll know.

PORCUPINE. It was. It was. Is't enough? Thou seemest
Slow in understanding, yet dost joke.
That argues wits. Here's all life's contradiction,
Yea, and the world's paradox in a word.
For thou suggestedst clover. That was a joke.
And I would laugh with thee, and now thou art dull.

WOODCHUCK. Where no joke is, I laugh not; where sweet grace,
I look with businessed soul on love's concern.
Bid me not laugh at clover. Oh, 'tis fair.
And, know, if the heart, out of the graven world,
Doth ever scriptures read, it reads them there.

PORCUPINE (*aside*). O merriest joke the joker doth not see.
O life of too light love, the joke's on thee.

RABBIT (*entering*). Good morrow, matrons both.

WOODCHUCK. And so to thee,
Thou mincing bachelor. Say, on this morn
Of beaming heaven's airs doth e'en your sense

Forsake its common lightness? Tell, and, if so,
We would your counsel for the playing know.

RABBIT. Give me no insult, matrons. Say, in a word,
I'm light and lack your curving gentry's beauties,
Yet life for her least child that cares and gives
Gifts various to every needy orphan
Tends in me too her use, and, on a day,
With mother's fingers and a pretty trouble
Coming, she reviews my world of blots
And asks me how I do. That's not too well.
But come, what herbs hast this day gathered? Tell.

PORCUPINE. Ah, there thou touchest the latent wasp
in the flower,
Ay, in the frond of spring the nested moth.
I would we had gifts gathered. Truly I would.
But we here loiter on the threshold hour
And in the vestibule of the dear day pause
And make no terms with difference. But so thou
Give good advice for gifts, 'twould peace allow.
(*Aside.*) Now he'll declare for bushes, and can I
With the webs and spiders of mistake be done.

WOODCHUCK (*aside*). A space a slightest cloud could
scurf the sun
And we'll seek clover sweet at his reply.

RABBIT. Ye should not keep dissent. That's a gross
fault.

'Tis tidings of the too small world in the heart
And of a universe of shapes forgotten.
'Tis a townsman's vice, and doth the mind
Of various bounty and a wide dominion
Never frequent. But there where beauty lives,
A king is as of some unstinted clime
Or, in the tale, the rich Phæacian prince,
Day on still day who in his garden cool
Calm justice gives where doth the plane tree stir,
And ever as upon a sunken sense
Falls the far beach's thunder, keeps repose
Of island hours beneath the western sun,
There at the August main a dream of sail
Whence seeks the drowsèd eye the Cretan shore.
So, so in the heart of cares is beauty,
And life's love is so. Find highways, then,
Unto concurrence. Peace, like a flower,
Grows in that place in stillness. Come, 'tis where
The fern grows by a rock and berries red,
The bright-eyed wintergreen, their sweets remedial
Gather in life's cool, that I would go.
There, close beside, the gentlest lettuce grows,
And fringèd carrots to the stooping air
Whisper day-music. Come, ah, come but there.

PORCUPINE. You'd have us bring lettuce and carrots.
Nay,
I'd know not if to laugh or weep with these.

Woodchuck. O not the common and civilian
things, the toys
Of play, the finger-matter of the moment,
Baubles for when the glozèd eye forgets
The hands' affections: these are not ours. No more's
The fungus growth upon the fallen tree,
Nor the stick of hapless shaping, nor the stones
That memory are unto eccentric earth
Of toppled years and circumstance antique.
They're but sea-shells for life's ear-captured children,
Listing through days so slight, so soon enflown
A noise e'en not the ocean's. No, but come
Whither in morning dress the clover waits.
For see, our fair guest, time, at our debates
Pines thin with unspoke grief and sadness dumb.

Rabbit. Oh, to have beauty, yet to take it not.
I'd liefer, when by windows waits the moon,
Keep terms at gossip, and the while sweet night
With face from pardon sad and mercy's eyes
Prolongs her tryst past the returnless hours,
Ply out talk's sluggy ravels; liefer this,
And liefer I ne'er spied Arcturus more
In heaven some space of stars beyond the crown
Of that dear maid who for the stranger prince
Her isle of youth forsook and sisters kind:
Yea, liefer I lost this and all the world
Of night's, trees', stars' and road's recall,

Which in the wandered dream of longest love
The soul calls his: — than, keeping it, disgrace.
To be near and yet to seek not, to discern,
Yet to deny. How comes it that the soul
Wills such a slight? 'Tis not that our few days
So many a store of pricèd wealth embrace
That this they should disparage. 'Tis a gift
So meet, so matched, in substance and design,
So well-conceived, so apt, so excellent,
That scarce the making and inventive earth
Could say here's such another. Ah and now
When you disprize it, what to wish and how?

Fox (*who has listened to the dispute, now enters*).
Good morrow, gentles. Gentles all, good day.
When morning's angels shine and the brave sun
Disspreads his beaming airs on dale and hill,
'Tis time of peace. May it be so with you.

Woodchuck. Alack, 'tis the cynic fox. That's the
worse to the bad,
The venom to the momentary sore.
In the world to be in amity most joint,
To seek but one desire, leaves yet the end
To friends' work; for there's Babel in our loves.
The limnage of desire, the portrait grace,
When fact doth paint it for us, is much shrunk,
And that's the usual end, e'en with good will.

But when the impotency's in the root
And the mind doth mock the antics of endeavor,
How succeed then? How make the slightest gain
When love, all shamefast, stands before disdain.

Fox. Though I said naught, thus am I welcomed.
Winter
Spake that good morrow. In the slighting world
The crowd, so careless of its good, so sunk
In the local boundaries of the sense, receives
Just thus the mind of counsel.

Rabbit. Nay, I prithee
No advising matter. That, on this day
Already of mixed music, were dismay.

Fox. So doth the fevered hand the vial reject
Wherein dear health inheres. So the cross child
On bilious and premonitory morning
Fears the oil. And yet 'tis briefer pain.
Wilt, then, not hear advice? 'Tis comfortable
When heard, not long endured in the hearing, kind
In result, a passing mischief. 'Tis but this.
Our stomach is a king and lords the mind
And all the spreaded, wondrous universe
Doth govern as 'twere his. For couriers five
Continually serve him. They're swift Sight,
Hearing, attent within his tower, and Taste,

The door page, joint upon a little space
With moody Smell, so variable in function,
Now so dull, now witched with sudden dream,
And slowest Touch whose artisan employ
Yields but a blunted language. These their king
Rejoice to dignify, but to the Mind,
Who, like the eyeless, ancient Jew, all day
Doth lace his strength to little works, they leave
Bread casually and a nourishment in passing.
And he, then, witless of higher state,
Serving an office that consumes him, dreams,
But to awake — fancies, yet soon forgets,
What life were, an that king existed not.

RABBIT. Oh, lewd intelligence and moated eye
That in life's changeful face but this descry.

WOODCHUCK. Were he duller, I'd lament; more tender, grieve.
As 'tis, I can no kindly thought conceive.

FOX. But look ye, friends, your gifts of love were lost;
For, ere I came, dissension stole the sweet.
But now strife's sequence and the hapless cost
Of heats were healèd all, were ye discreet.
Yet, an you will not hear me, this dear day
Hath missed the dream that love therein did find,

And all the gains of hope have sunk away
And all the augury our hearts designed.

(*They all leave for a moment.*)

Song

What sees the youth that cries, 'The heron flieth'?
What the bemusèd girl among night's trees
When softly the sad bird of love replieth
And the frail, wan orchis, cowled in the glamorous moon,
Strange healing utters to the soul's unease?
The world the passing heart at words detains,
And the trancèd moment of the senses' swoon,
Leaving for strange farewell a foundling's gains,
Is gone. And who doth read that Sibyl's boon?

When in meet season to belovèd toil
Slight birds across the airy hillside fly,
And oft again, enlade with nesting spoil,
Return to treetops where their young will lie,
Then with persuasion dear the month of May
Prompts many a gentle note and sweet reply.
When, so, the winds of vagrant springtime stray,
And the wafted moth across the shades of chance
Dallies and floats among the sunbeams' play,
A traveler, perhaps, in passing trance
A half ten thousand tiny gnats will see
Within a moil of cloud that, drifting, dance.
For thus dear tie and olden amity

Inclines them at a mute demand of morn.
And, thus, where by the wall the apple tree
Herself unto May's wooing doth adorn,
A singer, passing, trills some changeful lay
That o'er green field and orchard pale is borne;
And she that sings knows naught but that the day,
As sweet as dream at noon of shaded sleep,
With love's strange face doth lie about her way.
So still, so phrased with languor wild and deep
Doth spring her argument in hearts bestow,
And taskèd birds and labor's mortals keep
The sweet, wise madness and the wonder slow.
For as at little toils of field and hill
They pass, they dream of life what love doth show,
They look in instant rapture and fall still.

The world with drowsing rote charms every son,
While, from day-break, creatures, to speed old ends,
At place of last eve's pausing have begun.
Yet, as in dream, unto the duteous mind
An impulse of delight its strangeness lends.
And while a bird sings of its heart of glee,
Both he that sings and he that there attends
With eyes, estranged by love, life's meaning see.

THALIA. Now sleeps the day at boundless, airy height,
And earth, beneath that heaven of her hours,

From peakèd hill and distance-drowsy margin
Dreams in quaint repose. See, at the sky's verge,
Where the last, blue, farthest mountain marks
The term of gazing and extensive earth,
At her sweet pageant's end, doth say be done
To all that airy show, how the pale sky
There mingles substance with the departing earth
And, from its vision lost, draws to the height
Of cloud-ensteepled air each charmlike shape.
That briefest plain, these various hilly miles,
That mount and fall with lovely difference,
Unto such slumbrous circle interweave
Their woof of fairy seeming, and the sun,
With eyes of love, in heaven's gentleness
Doth warm the pretty show. — Now in the field
Small flies to some all-sultry haven ply
Their merchant passage while the wave sleeps,
And the air, most still before their wayward strokes,
Keeps, when they pass, the tumult for a moment.
As when, unseen, the rough Arcadian god
Reposes on a ledge where, close below,
Two trolling shepherds go and the meek flock
By stone and ivied olive crop and pass,
And he sees all, and, while the hours advance
And a bronze scarab labors past a clod,
Doth smile to con earth's changeful show, just so
Doth the soul see life. So to its godlike sense,
When thus the drowsèd fly his voyage drives

And a bird beats sudden wings, a rapture sweet
Distillèd is, and all the mirthful heart
Doth clap its hands and sing and make delight.
'Tis joy then that the olden poets sang,
And mortals humble in the season young
Hail and agnize with tongue of helplessness;
Joy that the gift of some celestial sight
Possesses in an instant, as it sees
A mood, a moment of the fashioned earth,
A love that moves the highest and the least. —
But mark, morn fares away. Lo, and the noon,
Most dull-head and bedosed, on field and hill
Spreads slumber and a dream of passing. Soon
The creatures all will come with presents slight
To deck this holiday, and I, the while
A bird from tree to tree sings love's delight,
Shall, through sweet hours, the sweets of thought beguile.

Woodchuck (*apart*). Now's time to fit arbitrament to the strife
And call in foreign saneness — not, thereto,
That I lack right, but that mild quietude
Should teach the fox what love would bid him do.

Fox (*apart*). Come, summon sensible jurors and make done
Lack-wit retort and every empty word

These people use to dress their village wisdom.
Attend till the mind's chancery is heard.

WOODCHUCK (*seeing* THALIA). Here's the girl. Tell her. — Maiden, look here ——

FOX (*seeing* THALIA). She's rational. Make trial. — Girl of good wits,
When the mind's farm passes to the fallow year ——

THALIA. Ah, I know, I know. Tell me not more of strife.
Have done but for an hour from the peaceless world,
And all the rack of trouble in the heart will slumber.
What do we seek? 'Tis not the unity
In giving, the device of estimate.
They're but endeavor's vapors. When in March
The heaven at surcease from tearful days
Imports to earth a morn of airs and of south
Above the talking valley, what is there then
But the sudden, wannest hope, but the dream of spring
That follows? Then, though rude Boreas
Mars files of days with gifts intemperate,
Yet doth the heart still keep that other promise,
And the waters and the weeks of indigence
Are dear complaints. And so with us. This day,
As 'twere the length of very life, its essence
Gave in hope that, hour by hour, we'd know

The deeper issue and the benefit
Abiding. Now at the year's new-opened door
Flowers in thicket and in field unclose
Their faces sweet, and the most fragrant earth,
With Flora's laughter filled, goes garlanded
In gladdest crowns and vesture of endearment.
See, by the wall, the daisy seeks the sun,
And, nodding through the hours, the coal-eyed flower,
Her very swarthy cousin, joins that milk-girl
In rehearsal of their simple staves
Of music worshipful. 'Tis but an hour
These keep the song that is their life's account;
And yet the blissful stars, when age untold
Remits those fires from heaven's wandering,
Will, at the last frail moment of their light,
Have sung to God no dearer adoration.
Day's but a moment, and the length of days
A moment's shadow, and the heaven high
Alone doth read the dreamy writing.
Wherefore, war not. That's weary pleasure. Put
From the mind the minute's play, the toys of passing.
Peace is a brief flower. Nay, it doth expand
Within the garden of the heart its petals
But in passing. So, where stoops the hill
And the rivulet doth sing its song of lightness,
There where the reeds lisp hour by hour, we'll stay.
And while the sun entowers his eye of brightness,
List, as noon goes, the passing of the play.

WOODCHUCK (*to herself*). The sloven hearts lept not,
nor felt the breeze
Of beauty, wherefore I could naught with peas.
Alas, the pain of too fine thoughts: to grope,
To search, to stand with sudden-beating hope
Before the portal, fancy. Ah, to see
E'en this; then in the stertorous company
Of the solid-sleeping world, to wake no hearts.
There is the freighted cargo of a grief.

PROLOGUE TO THE PLAY

Hither, wanderer, at the heels of May,
Where Flora's hands her pretty boons bespread,
And buttercups and the wild rose and red
Dream to the drowsing height of heaven's day.
Here Primavera and the nymphs of play
Prim coronals emplait with lovely sense,
And Zephyrus, all wanton purposèd,
With winds robs yet their gentle diligence
And leaves to love the laughter of dismay.
Sage Sophy, eke, of mildest wisdom's mien
Reads in spring's wind her innocent sentence,
And while the moth the poisèd flower doth glean
And the enslumbered morning wends away,
She takes with rapture's eyes the meaning thence
And knows the love the lifted heart hath seen.
The grass bends by the wall when the air stirs,
And a bird, upborne upon that wooing gale,
Sings with May's wit beyond the treetop green
The song that is his heart's most simple tale,
And all the voiceless earth its love infers
And all its sweetness in that carol frail,
And hears therein what its own life doth mean.
Ah, 'tis a gentle lore the day imparts
That leaves its drifted gladness long and clear

And fairest courtesy to mortal hearts
Of humbleness doth wed and thankful cheer.
And life forth from that hour with joy departs
Keeping to farthest days the lesson dear.
Where the wild apple tree, in dress of spring,
Its shade strews on a space of sward and flowers,
And winds a wandered motive scarcely bring
Of motion or remove through tranquil hours,
There the mild kine that gaze beyond the field
Muse, through the day, time's tune of vanishing;
And as their murmured trace the minutes yield
And a bee steeps slumber with its passing wing,
The wended morn hath all her love revealed,
And all the earth is glad for that fair thing.
Ah, hither, hither, wanderer; for the sun
Hath but commenced his lay of godlike praise,
And, in and out the dance, the Hours discreet
With steps of shadow tread a silent maze.
But come, and ere the cicade has begun
His sleepy canticle, and beast and bird
The poppy and the dream of slumber sweet
Have drunken, and the swinkèd airs have died,
We'll smile as Silen mouths a country word,
And many a nymph wakes laughter at his side.
Ah come; for mirth May's madrigals has heard.
Come, wanderer sweet, and with us here abide.

THE PLAY

(*Since, although it is noon, the play occurs in a dark place in the woods, the players imagine that it is evening.* ROLAND *and* OLIVER, *two countrymen, enter.*)

OLIVER. The moon, like a bucket red, now hangs in the east,
And the day, that journeyman merchant, all his wares packed,
Hath taken the road over the hill. 'Tis now
The hour that frogs croak and night's kinless birds
Repeat their dolorous lays, and mortals we,
Loosèd from burdens, dream at heaven's lamp.

ROLAND. See there a spring, black-watered, ever winks
At the moon. Let's sit down here and gather strength.
Sooth, we need it, home being far. They say
That water-cress most excellently repairs
The frame. We'll sit and pluck the herbs in the dark.

OLIVER. I see but as a blind man sees, with my hands.

ROLAND. Well, none the worse. You can loose pack and sit down.

OLIVER. An did I wish it, I could. Now say,
When the air thickens, and the mind, field-like
By a night-chanting brook, shudders in mist
Most vaporous and dank, just at this hour,
The sun being quenchèd quite, do you reflect
On the dead? I know not why, live potencies,
E'en supernatural, yea and most ghoulish,
That is, satyrs, pixies, gnomes, lumped goblins,
And such spell-tethered folk, freeze not my soul
Like wraiths. Ah, they're, as it were a draught, a door
Blown open felly and the chill of gibbets
In the heart. Well, I suppose I must sit down,
But in this creeping hour I do not like to.

ROLAND. A requiem to fears.

OLIVER. Say not requiem.

ROLAND. Well, amen and a toll.

OLIVER. Nay, nor not these.

ROLAND. Well, then, sit down and grope for cress.
Your fears
Are to me naught, a mist on a mirror
Which boys mark letters in and wipe away,
Naught but a breath. Sit now, the ebon spring
Lies like a sleeper waked, tracking the voyaged moon

With thoughts in the nightly hour. Here in earth's
corner
Flowers of their little lives the fragrance leave.
Here sit and we'll wait. Here sit by the dark spring.

OLIVER. Hast somewhat to eat?

ROLAND. A little bread,
The kine-eyed yokel among foods. Had we meat,
We'd eat it. That's for them that endure life,
Take the foul with the pretty; 'tis a gross food,
Yet strengthening. Herbs do make lithe the mind,
Herbs, spinach, and such windy greenery.
Appraisers nice, your very fine-strung folk,
Subsist thereon. Had they to sow and plow,
They'd eat. Well, here's bread. Hast found any cress?

OLIVER. Nay, and I wish you'd cease. My night-bat
fears,
Flown from the plumbless cave of what might be
Yet what's not certain, brush in the sinister air.
And you, like a bald dieter in an office,
Still, still of physic talk. Say, hast no fears?

ROLAND. See. As 'twere an Ethiope slave our spirits
fanned
And he did ever eye us and revolve
In umbraged thoughts a buried people's wile,

Still eyeing, eyeing; so breathes now the night.
'Tis about us, a huge man and inky presence.
Turn and look over your shoulder — yet naught's there.
Now I will tell a thing all unrevealed.
I too have a fear, not yours of ghosts, a fear
Intangible as spirits in the old sea story,
Of what might watch in the woods. Were-wolf I say
Or some lank thicket-demon. I hear tell
That these their ravened chops most balefully lick
And watch by the poison-dropping hemlock.
I know naught solid thereon. Sooth, who does?
I know not to eat horse chestnuts and to pull
Wild carrot from the hay field. Ah, but here,
In the vague and dream of life, how doth a doubt
Yet witch mortality. Those things we know,
We can know more of, yea and grow most smart,
Down to the telling your Greek from your Italian,
And there's an end. But who in the night's mid-watch
Waking, then broods on what he knows?

OLIVER. Alas,
I know a man most cognizant of were-wolves.
In the dark he'd know a were-wolf from a bush.
But he's not here. A pity he's not here.

ROLAND. So be it. We'll philosophize with our fears
And chide them with syllogisms till they flee.
Hast water cress? I hear you munch in the dark.

OLIVER. 'Tis a most wondrous recreating herb.
My fears doze now like a bear in a log.

ROLAND. Pray there come no hunters. Let's rest now
And knock at the huge-doored hospital of sleep,
Where they'll till morn our pensioner spirits keep.

(PORPHURIO, *a magician, has entered and, invisible to the two countrymen, has listened to their talk.*)

PORPHURIO. Hear the clowns bandying fears in the dark.
What's night that they should fear? Naught but the closet,
The unwindowed room of earth. Yet still thereto
Children import a pleasing terror, play
With old overcoats for demons and with shoes,
Worn to yesterday's dance, for sprites and gnomes.
Then the nurse Sun sends them a while on errands
And they cease. A drear spectacle for the informed.
As for myself, I know all potencies,
Being a magician, down to the charming
Of fleas and plated grass-hoppers. On a rose
I can grow thorny lances 'gainst the bug
And him thereat leave but the hero's way.
What's more, I can so deep bedazzle crows
They'll fear a scarecrow. When, then they counsel
In the air-mounting pine, there'll be rebuttal.
Old crows, molted with years and wisdom, will repeat

'Tis idle wivery to fear scarecrows,
To fly bodefully higher therefrom, in short,
To make an intermittance by old dreads
To the crows' social good. Rather, they say,
Scarecrows are marks that wave to the surfeiting way.
Yet still to my witching knit, a few will hold
So, a day gone, they too had thought, but now
In the hat and scrannel-peeping coat they wist
A power. So and with such reciprocal wind
They'll wake from the tree the wending summer's day,
And poppied evening will but drug debate.
Well, the yokels sleep. The rich and the poor
Lie down, and slumber on their lids writes shadows.
An I could, I'd be a townsman. The year's round,
Hale company in tasks, and the broad world
No broader than your hearth: that's Saturn's reign.
Nay but I pine in the officering of spells,
Masking the year for fairy tasks and sabbaths.
They can naught for themselves. 'Tis always I,
Must send on bees to the steepled hyacinth
Fays to find sweet for May day, and must wake
Under the violet the slothful toad.
And do I not, his slumber-wits neglect
The jewels most pale which the ring-dancing fairies
Drop in a night's mazourka on a lawn.
Thus task-wed days, hours of ungainly surfeit

Jostle the citizens' highway to a null.
I'd catch at quittance, like a boy at a big trout,
Could I by candles conscience intermit
And with an eremite's rosary woo peace.
But how in my stead would orphanhood be stepdame,
That's the affair of conscience; how to keep
The dream-wits of the woods, who, I being gone,
Would straight from labor's penury be pining.
That thought there'd be no peace for. So I'll stay
And eke my task-stifled solitude with dreams.
  So the two rustics, shelled like snails in a sleep,
Take the short cut to morning. And I muse.
I've often sworn I'd be a villager,
Wear lump-toed shoes on Sunday, and sit still
Throughout the service. That's my elysium,
The asphodel place, as near as where the wood ends.
Ah, but the gnomes! Yet could I find but once
Aught but this sunflower-turning to my will,
Find, in a word, ill-temper, self-design,
Thought, or such other limber growings up
As might be omen to some liberty,
I'd leave, I'd over the stile to the village.
And there I'd live like a mole or a storekeeper.
  Well, the night sleeps, and the nightwatchman moon
On a still tenantry his lantern turns.
Now I'll lie here and woo rest in the ferns.

(*They all sleep.*)

SONG

Down, down the sunset way
To the night's pool
Begone and slide the wry hour's ray
To lethe and the cool.

Birds the day long that loop and tumble
After bugs at balcony of heaven
Fold hearts to thickets humble
When the clock comes seven.

A prayer's time, a moment, earth's dulled wights
Stay murk with a penny taper,
But out the casements beaming, the frail lights
Sink in night's vapor.

Slaked of the slothful mere,
The day-rout sleep.
Frogs and the horn-fish tedious and drear
Dank vigil keep.

ROLAND (*waking*). I dreamt a falling star and a frog
in the pool.
Or did I see them? A thought to crack nuts with.
I saw yon bush. Nay, or was it a bush?
In the hall-way hour and passage from a sleep
To waking there is riddle stuff. As't were
You had in a house two rooms, sleep and awareness;
Then only in the twixt-space and the skirting

From the one to th'other do you interpass
The rest of the sundry domiciliaries.
There's Oliver, to me no dream, though he be
To himself. Belike now he's an Athos monk.
He said he fears wraiths; he'd be safe in Athos,
Where the present so sits to meat with the past
It takes a philosopher to know who's dead.
Wraiths make a childish fear, the hobgoblin
On the dark first stair. I find it infantile.
But come, but here, a thought! Suppose I could
Plant lessons in sleep's slothful interval,
And from the tardying void instruction take,
'Twould be a benefit. I have a cloth
We use for milk straining. I'll be a ghost
And fare from eternity on a cheese-rag.
Then when I've froze the lesson in his soul,
Like a fly in amber, I'll tell him. He'll be cured.
He'll thank me with a wonder-beaming face.
Thrice friend who doth friend's paltridom erase.

Oliver (*waking*). So and I'm awake. I turn the corner
From the dream-street, and find earth again.
When you lie, you sleep. When you sleep, the camp-companion
Planets heap their high beacons as yours fades.
I'll be still and watch Roland in the clod way,
Lumpish slumber. Is he or a shadow there?

It looks a shadow. Nay, I guess 'tis he,
Eyes shut as almonds against seeing a wolf.
He gropes at blindman's buff to catch quiet,
The girl in the game you know by her hair ribbon.
Ah but the fellow players, the cruel boys,
Do tweek his nose with panics and prolong
At their still-seizeless footfalls fear. 'Tis sad
To see men grope with boding at a naught,
Most piteous. Yet 'tis comic. — Well, the night
Revolves his stately altitudinous wheel,
And I wake by the tree. Hold now, I'd think.
Could I connive with shadows for a good
And out of night, the slag and old iron of life,
A dear commodity for Roland weld,
For joy I'd not change with a bishop. Here.
I have a coat in color like your type,
Your Plato's master-mold of a were-wolf.
In that I'll stalk, and by a present terror,
Matched with a ridicule to come, I'll cleanse
This paradigm of men of his one slur.
He's friend who for friend's good will wrath incur.

PORPHURIO (*waking*). Alas, I wake. That's the uncrowning time
When each to his particular royalty
Patent remits. I dreamt I was of the village,
Sat nights in the grocery store at tobacco; —
I turned in my sleep, and the necessitous demos

Of the Now most gruff unkinged me of my bliss.
So, like the beggar in the book, my royal hour past,
I'll tie trouble in a handkerchief and be off.
But where to, that's the demur. I know too well,
Down the adust work-lanes and the hedgerows sear
Of days, where one turn in the road knows the next,
And each step from much-trafficking habitude
Fortreads the steps to come. That's my repair.
But I know a path; it leads to the village.
Some day when the entrusted fays wax wise
Or when decease takes stepdame conscience off,
Leaving me heir to moneys, I'll be gone,
Be gone, be gone. Heigh-ho and would 'twere now.

ROLAND (*putting on the white cloth behind one tree*).
My, what a ghost I am! I could wake the choir
During the sermon, so weird's my aspect.
Nay, the cloth hectors it in my own soul
And to myself I wear a ghastly seeming.
'Tis well. In the pit and hole of night
A moment's guile will work my Oliver rest.

OLIVER (*putting on the gray coat behind another tree*).
If any have sought a were-wolf, look on me;
For here he body and perfection finds.
Once I went fancy-dancing as an Arab,
But I was not the Arab, yea though fine
And fit to ride camels, that I am the garou.

So, night, but finish fiction with thy dusks,
And we'll fee Roland with a lasting good.

PORPHURIO. Silent the air, as the night-flower
breathes in sleeping,
And the wan white rose, trysting within the close,
Pines at the moon astray his starry road.
How still she stands and with no wordy solace
Attends the soul-wandering chantry that the spheres
Compound of viols perfect, while the wind,
On errand to the isles, passing remits
In a leaf's stir the sorrow unappeased.
So silent is it. I've noted on such nights
Gnomes don't molest, nor witches watching take.
Therefore I'll mime the stones and lie quiet.

ROLAND. The night has hasted to the perfect hour.
I'm ready.

OLIVER. Now's the peak of time. I step.

ROLAND. Saints, what's that by the tree?

OLIVER. Alack, there's stirring
By yon bush. What is it?

ROLAND. A were-wolf.

OLIVER. 'Tis a wraith.
As I move, he moves.

ROLAND. He's fixed me with his eye.

OLIVER. Will he come nearer?

ROLAND. He'll kill me with staring.
If he's going to leap, I wish he'd do it.

OLIVER. Suspense
Is worse than dying.

ROLAND. He retreats a little.
Belike he's going to spring.

OLIVER. See him crouch.
Mark him but as he stoops.

ROLAND. I hear him breathing.
What a fell throttle.

OLIVER. He still retreats.
I'll go back inch by inch, lest he see and spring.

ROLAND. He's nearly gone. This is my exit moment.

OLIVER. He's gone. Quick. I'll hunt safety in the bush.

PORPHURIO. What, perjurous eyesight, do you thus lay by
A candor which the honest years had scoured?

Or did I see true? Nay, that's what cannot be.
I know all spirits and the sundry means
Of such trans-burial business. But what's this,
Fallen odd in the dell as bees in the night-bane?
Witching 'tis not, nor can it be mortality.
For in the gaping hour of the sight-circle
And the interval of eyes, what mortal plots
To change bed for a wood's pantomiming?
That's out of thought. You'd reckon cats at night
At four times the number of astronomers,
Doctors, and hornpout fishers taken in one.
The dark's obscure; yet for a certainty
The two yokels dream there in the shadow.
The puzzle's a lost tune. Tell me. — Belike —
But that dear potentiality grown fact
I dare not brood on — Yea and still belike —
Ah, too rash leap of fancy — They are gnomes.
In the night they've boldened; they've found hardihood
To button on fancies for themselves. They're men
In purpose and waxed fledgling from my care.
Ah, dream too dear, ah, future too to taste.
Yet could I seize what I dream, could I own the hope,
'Twould be the capstan to my anchored life.
I'd make conscience swim for it and I'd sail
Out to desire's old Eldorado. 'Sdeath,
I'll not bandy a backwardness at heaven.
'Nay, and do you really wish me?' or

'Judge but again.' That's not the way of the world
And doubtless not of heaven. I'll take the proof,
The earnest of aërial alterations.
I'll wait morn, and hie it with the lads to town.
So, fairies, farewell, and man-grown gnomes, adieu.

OLIVER (*reappearing*). I'll slant eyes round the tree at the ghost-place.
If he's there, I'd not be seen. Nay, all's empty
As a spring hay-mow. I'll creep softly back,
Hide wordless the wolf's panoply in the bag,
So as not to stir Roland. The glimpsing
Of the ghost had sense. That he took peaceful leave
Is a parable the more. 'Twas a warning
To lay by the Jesuit's whisper-play
And the back-alleying to a good. I've learned.
No breath of it to Roland, but enough
To pasture the instruction in remorse
And to hope that a well-tended virtue,
Paired with a prudent shying from night woods,
Will work placation. So I'll resume sleeping.
Yet night wanes old, and from the crack in the east
Wind draughty harbingers of the graying.
Soon the pale flood that wells through meadow dark
And the sweet, damp copse will cleanse the blanching earth
Of night and a fear's soil. Come, dawn, I wait.

ROLAND (*reappearing*). Is it there yet? Nay, dark
robes the dell again.
Thank saints and vow penitence. Ah, boy, learn
A casuistry's cost; copy to heart
How the mind's bats and mouse-nests blink to light
At honor's labefaction. People say
Honor's an old house, and in truth, 'tis styled
In the antique art that modern joiners jilt,
Being large, not handy, lasting, not adept.
They say, too, it has garrets for rats, and that's truth.
Your neat modernities have no rats, but yet
They scarce have men, either, being too tight
For thought to take ease in. If rats concur
Within all old and easy domiciles,
Then I'll choose and chastize the rats, and keep the
house.
But here I stand making fables at my sin.
Come, pack the cloth, feign dreaming, and to Oliver
No word's dilution of your soul's sour drink.

PORPHURIO. The rustics move sighing in blameless
slumber.
And I wait. Come, sun, and end the weary travel.
Come ship me homeward from outlandish night.
Day's home and my western island. Night's the exile
To the wanderer dreaming his distant land.
Come, day, and halt the parleying minutes, come.

(*All sleep.*)

SONG

Hark, day's wayfarer is singing.
Dawn comes, your lad of legs, the boy,
Nimbler than goats in pastures rough and high.
Their clear bells shake across the hillside ringing.
But Dawn's no idler; he's away the paths of joy
To the dark valley nigh.

Beside his barn the farmer fares to planting.
He looks. 'Halloo, bright plough-boy on the road.
Whither to field, so blithe and early out?'
The road is short. It seeks the river chanting
In the hoarse glen, wound with a misty load.
Dawn's on the bridge. 'Hi, angler, hast big trout?'

ROLAND (*waking*). What, is it morning, I here, the
sun up?
Ah, trumpeting sight and band-master to steps.
Wake, Oliver. Already dawn doth mark
The path ahead of us that leads us home.

OLIVER. Say, is that so? I was adream of night
And of some craven perturbation. Now
You say 'tis day. But my own eyes have that news.
Go, fears, swim off night's weedy flood. 'Tis dawn,
'Tis daybreak, and from up the mountainous dark
We reach the antique hostel at the pitch
To the other vale. And all meet there. In truth,

Few know it; for the snoozing merchantman's
In feathers, when life's tardiers from books
And barroom hail the farmer on the road,
Hands pocketed as deep as distant China
And pipe lit. Well, forth. We'll step the road
The heaven-vagrant lark doth gayly wake.
We'll make of fancy feathers to the load
Our backs bear, and we'll follow as these take.

PORPHURIO. Hi, there! I'm for the town. Come on with me.
Way-shortening company walks arm in arm
With miles and finds those scolders jocular.
Come and we'll sing and raise an hale alarm.

ROLAND. We will. Yonder's a house where siren breakfast
From the roof-pot woos with yearning. That's our goal.
We'll go with you and there we'll make repast.

OLIVER. You know I'm glad to leave that woody plot.

ROLAND. Nay, is that possible?

PORPHURIO. Hard to believe.

OLIVER. No. I protest there's pleasure in the leave.

ROLAND. And so we're off, cares and instructions packed.
Song's the best company. So let's sing;
Let's praise the spring and make cows stare from pasture.

SONG

By our paths, by our feet straying
Goes now the greening year,
The alleyed beeches after,
The lindens in their lawns.
These, the dear maids of Maying,
Call to the oaks, yet sear,
Call them and chide with laughter,
While the sweet season dawns.

Rains weary winter follow,
And roses at the rain,
Roses that in south's weather
From field to farmyard run.
And in the wind-safe hollow,
For garland-wearing feign,
Leaf and new bud together,
The lilacs have begun.

So we at the pipes of springing
Wend off the orchard-way
To hillsides under heaven,

To fields where daisies throng.
Youth pipes, and who's not singing,
As the south wind, loved of May,
Doth lift wan hearts and leaven
Loves with ancient song?

(*The play being finished and the noon hour passed, the spectators now talk among themselves.*)

RABBIT. So of this pageant-passing may we hear
The words pursue the many-echoed year,
Mocking with voices and the fleet back-thoughts
That whisk our hearts with motion. Wherefore, when wind,
When sudden tumult down the gladed mind
Wakes words from silence, then, then, we shall hear
Again the Thespis of the summer mood,
And old masques, dreamed in old, bland times again.

WOODCHUCK. What, still dost fancy with the faulty world
And find naught there but love? In life 'tis sweet
Still to admire, and charitable wonder
Round earth's circumstance sets heaven at a thought.
And yet as oft that's blindness. First, forsooth,
Ye sigh with wondrous gust. Next doth appear
Civil-appareled Fancy hapful by,
And thou and he in theme of opening
Cite many a chancèd friend and linking spot

That doth announce you brothers. Promptly, then,
Ye do embrace, and he with speech of dreams
So domiciles your wastes of high regard,
Is so your youth of favor, that, at last,
The burr of earth that pricks the flawless vision
Ne'er will unmate ye twain. And thou, thus blind,
In sweet, convincèd innocence dost say
That what thou dreamst was, sooth, the recent play.

RABBIT. Ah, no. Ah, never. Say not that the earth
Hath naughty bias against love's assault.
The dream doth shape the waking, and the dearth
Cleanses with high desire its native fault.

FOX (*apart*). Here's discord, brother to hot love, the child
Of local and unvoyaging affection,
Imp that doth pilfer judgment, enemy
Unto the good in the particular.
Let me now mark it well, and when these three
Have slipped their consonance, I'll helpful be.

WOODCHUCK. Nay, but the play was ill. Didst not behold
How but a fictive and a clowning gait
Replaced free-ambling life? One ever had
Here to adjust, there to make fancy serve,
Again to corset up ungainly truth

Into suppositious corners. Yea,
E'en then it breathed not well. Of water-cress
One wight did eat; another spake of ghosts;
And all in trepitude of frequent dream
Troubled reposeful sleep. And yet I eat
No cress, and sleep my slumber's episode
Safely in earth. And all woodchucks do this.
Must not, therefore, all else be life amiss?

Fox (*apart*). Oh, wondrous, oh, too wild in the world
of stars,
In earth's close moil of countless neighborhood,
In life so fair, glimpsèd with brief design,
To hear what men name good.

Porcupine (*to* Woodchuck). See not alone the flaws
of attitude,
My friend, nor the imposture in life's play.
This is I know not why, rarely doth mend,
Plagues each device with varied pestilence,
Is naught but when ignored. The liming world
That catches at our dreams can sink away,
And life's sentence of years, phrased in our faults,
When fault and finery alike are off,
Will touch with truth strayed from a scene forgot
The general issue of existence. Thus,
In the play three clowns, pricked with unrestful need,
Each proffered darkly for a friend's repair

His witless love, his kind incompetence.
Each thought to cure; yet each from sickly life
Was ill in his own temper; and the night
Empty had been of all the dreamèd good.
But fate — mark here the sweet fortuity —
Did mate them so in mutual effect,
So musicked in their flats, that each heart now,
Purged of reproof, thinks angels of the act
Wherein mistake was agent. This the law
Of the circumambient love, which heart with heart
In theme of use and fair community
Sets to life's godlike task was thus the play.
A meager play, yet sparing praise too high,
Call it the pool unto the painting sky.

Fox (*apart*). Alas, a dusty flower, a world as you will,
A hawk in the soul chained to the crowding gaze,
A night of stars easy of thought, a life
Too, too secure. So 'tis when any act
To any good is symbol, so when desire
Writes its own wish in the sky, so when the world,
Housing a million neighbors in an inch,
Makes but man's little maxim.
Ah, but just here
Is my place to stop at. Lo, in the simple heart,
God lives beyond the treetop, and the sky
Bends with concern over the fretful earth.
Of this the wise heart knows. And yet therein

Still to assault uncertainties at a jump
And, in a world of if's, a general peace
Still to disspread on reason: that I cannot.
Alas to know, yet but in measure small,
Alas to dream, yet doubt that dreams are all.

RABBIT (*to himself*). See, hath the sky forgot the garbing cloud,
And like a courtier is, civil for May.
Markest how at his feet the soot, slight earth
Lies as a flower in span of dreamlike change?
What doth he see that stoops so gentlelike?
The flower of earth, brief as love's piercèd thought,
Doth strangely chide with meaning. Dear, what dost know,
O sky, that pausest there?

WOODCHUCK. Now, strayed and silly mind, canst thou not stay?
Questionful life abides our weighing thoughts,
And thou dreamst of a flower. Nay, I'll be off.
The porcupine, too drowsed in kindly wit,
Doth praise the play, and thou forgettest it.

FOX (*apart*). Now is my hour, when angry gentleness,
Oppressed and stung, untunes all his mild lute.
The sonant mind that sings without a flaw

Of heaven and nature's use and years of design
Thinks not to fall on fools' days. For that hand
Doth random the wise notes. All, then, were through,
All perishèd, the frangent music lost,
Would not the mind that marks the sorry cost
Publish its pain, as I now sadly do.
(*Aloud.*) Attend, friends.

WOODCHUCK. Lo, the fox. There is the end.
Prithee, advise us not. We cannot mend.

FOX. And yet the sky is mirror to your deeds
And glasses them in crackless parity.
Stoop, and it stoops; rise, and the countenance
Of all your gaining writes its virtue there.
Choose not to see, 'twill be a wight so choosing.
Nay, markest not how three are writ therein
In a green nook conning a summer's play?
The first a dame of action, brief in glance,
Whose arming goodness 'gainst the unlike world
Would cleanse freaked nature out; for she doth name
Life's dissimilitude its spot, and all
That her slight world doth wist not is her ill.
The next so kindly is that life's each word
Doth obvious parable of love convey,
And as she looks, the reasonable play
Of prompting motives in the strifeful act
Among her dreams no import doth unroll

But this, that earth is servant to the soul.
All wrapped, the third, in trancèd cloud proceeds,
Which, like the wind, doth kiss the poetic flower.
Of ordered step and mental consequence
He will naught know, but broods upon a clod,
Wherefrom in various gust of passing sense
He doth such meaning take that, though a child,
Yet doth he sometimes laugh with wisdom wild.
And now, good friends, say how among such three
Without advice fair harmony can be?

WOODCHUCK. Fume, acid, in the singeing mind and feed
On all our good green world. For you are less
Than that which doth create life's gentleness,
And where you rend, love yet will cast the seed.

PORCUPINE. Why doth the fox chide us? I see not why.
God makes us all to live varied in sense,
And each, as he can, doth con his little sky.
The earth's concerns, I think, are the offense.

RABBIT. Mark ye. The inchèd worm spans the frail leaf.
A space beneath a bough, a greenwood day,
And the tale is done. Ah, life, so still, so brief.
Why do we strive, and thou dost wend away?

Fox. From moonlight go indoors content; a pine tree
Climb with unimpasted hands; bring from the well
A bucket without spilling: all these things
Thou'lt sooner do than make men friends to truth.

Now see, these three, in strifeful heat dismayed,
Will nothing hear when I would give them aid.
Most gentle reason and reposèd thought
Unto the temper's war do profit naught.
For love, oft praised, yields yet but opposition.
Who, who to heal fierce heats will be physician?
Who will secure our garland-hoping life
From withering to winter with sad strife?
For life is fair, sweet-essenced, of sweet powers,
Did not opinion devil with its hours.

Song

When, in the wan and infant days of spring,
The skeiny mists web treetops with the sky
And slanting down the north in inroads shy,
The girls of the mad gusts on hillsides fling
The season's rainy gifts and, flinging, fly;
'Tis then at their wet heels the earth doth ring
With noisèd speech and hopeful murmuring
Of brooks, new-freed, that gather to the cry
Of stream and reinless river, of the trees
Touched by the warmth full deep in branches bare,
Of men who, restless at the kinder breeze,

Ponder their stock and their new seeds prepare,
And of love's wistful heart which, wakening,
Doth oft sweet praise conceive and often sing.

For the rathe, wan trillium and the rose
Would dress themselves unto the waxing sun,
When the violets unclose
And the flowers of May, adored by mortals glad,
In rustling glade and bankèd hillside run.
And the minstrel amorous,
In thicket the brown thrush, wondrously sad,
Doth wake all night with longing; for that spring
Is come, and he and all are feign to sing.

It is the tide when, in the tuneful plain,
Winter's duress hath loosed its cruel hand,
And holt and greenwood o'er the springing land
Unto sweet May with revel turn again.
For lo, the geese do cry their hasting train,
And farmers cold who at the doorway stand,
Harking on wind of quest that skyward band,
Know that the spring doth wait behind the rain.
Sooth, then, the year hath winter in despite
And o'er the fields under the Lenten sky
Doth prick all men to go for love's delight
To offer thanks and in sweet praise to vie:
For that the spring is come again to bring
To needful earth its winds of wakening.

THALIA. Still, now, with steps of dream the errant day
Doth walk in gentleness the western field
And, from dull noon quiet and labor done,
Pauses ere he departs. The far-lit earth,
On hill of sunshine and the lowland green,
Touched and adorned by him in dress of thanks,
Now when the eve is nigh, owns not a word
Of telling or of speech unto that god
Of gifts that he has given; but most glad,
From fields of calm and where the lifted tree
Suns his cool head and scarce one leaf dismays,
Doth in the ending light of heaven's day
Find, at the last, her quiet in his love
And smiles but as he tarries. Now the crow
Over the meadow deep from hill to hill
Who flies and calls to like his termless view
Hears the rough answer o'er the ridge of green
And, calling, wends to distance. Wondrous, then,
As when a farmer at his taxing hoe
Raises his head from thoughts he minds not of
And, in a moment's sight, sees the frail tree,
Most silent near the sun's end, and the birds
Weaving and passing o'er the gentle knoll,
And he is glad for that the eve is nigh
And broods his cares in quiet; so the earth
Doth now for its small time. So with repose
On pasture high and shining eminence,

Tracking the voyaged hour that, sloped and still,
Descends with so mild face unto the west,
Peace, like a god, with footsteps o'er the hill
Fares to the passaged evening. Then, with joy
The earth at the surcease of gentle day
Gives unto calm her heart in thankfulness,
When mortals homeward on the road well-loved
Silently pass and see the ending light.
They think of morrow hopeful and the eve,
Of tasks undone, of fortune to brief life
So kindly, of few days beneath the sky.
And but to mark these well is all their wish,
As, from the road, some field of daily view
Returns unto the sight wondrous and calm,
And o'er the far-spread earth the waying sun,
Stooping in kindness, quits his dream of light.

FOX (*seeing* THALIA). Lo, in the world, a quiet and an
end
Upon e'en evil wait, and life's reproof
Writes profit on our ills. Now 'twill be thus
When I these peoples' ignorance discuss.

WOODCHUCK (*seeing* THALIA). Here doth the moment
wait upon the word
When spiteful strife, the wit's perversity
Will sink without a token. Then to hear
The shamed, reproofful fox were joyance dear.

Fox (*aloud*). Wise maid, the mind's a jewel. 'Tis sad to lose it.

Woodchuck (*aloud*). Sweet arbiter, now hear me my complaint.

Thalia. Don't tell me this that discord's out again
And cankering anger withers the day's rose.
Say not 'tis this. For see, our parable
Is margined of the eve's hand, and the page
That we conceived scarcely in wish begun
Waits not a better scanning. 'Tis the hour
When travelers far abroad who, from their tasks,
Mark other men released and hear glad voices
And the bell ringing so fair for all but them,
Now in the golden space ere closing night
See in another land a selfsame road
And fields like those they pass and, for a time
A man could say a prayer, are themselves close
To those that know it not. 'Tis hour of doves
With wings outstretched and calm who o'er the village
Sink to the belfry white and, murmuring,
There tell each his concern and fly no more.
For now the evening, mother of the day,
Gathers her children to her, great and small,
So that not one is deaf to hear her voice,
As from the silent woodland, pleached of night,
Birds make reply and mortals, marveling,

Hear in that speechless song the phrase of love.
And the weak, small fly, quested and ventureful,
Sails but a journey more, as, past his wings,
The heaven, blameless of a cloudy slur,
Winds his repose in altitude of calm
Beyond earth's mountain crowns, and wearièd,
Hyperion's gentle boy, his respite nigh,
Slowly adown the hill unto the night
Turns to his vanishing. 'Tis then, at last,
Small children at some late device of play
Laugh in the flowers and shun their mother's voice.
With dripping noses from the homeward stream
The gentle kine mount up, and the hired man
Scrapes dirt from his hoe and whistles as he wends
Home to his house upon the farther hill.
Can ye not mold it so? Look ye, the sun,
Like in the west unto a farmer stout,
Hath worked his plough across the tedious sky.
Green the reposeful field doth lie, and far,
Far down the valley, the flocks of the white sheep,
Like minutes creeping on the hillside, day,
Shake their thin bells. The song-boy's mounting lay
Clear-voiced across the hasteless evening winds.
Thus at eve's door, ere Hesperus o'er the west,
Sings in far bliss and all the forest sleeps,
Let us to sweet day done for the small hour
Also make thankful song in hearts at rest.

Song

The night-hawks, when the hour of day is by,
Ascend in heaven o'er the eastern hill,
Where doth Capella frailly shine and still
In her far realm beyond the treetop high,
And now as easelessly the airs fulfill
Day's little interval below the sky,
Circling and swift, they weave where none descry
And call their plaintive chantry while they will.

A mother and a child, late in the field,
Retrace with unlike steps the saddened way,
And while the mother stoops, the child doth say
The sweet account of all its day did yield.

Thus, in the spring, birds for a little hour
Conceive brief melody before the night,
As would they pray God keep them to the light,
For that they love Him too in tiny power.

Now, one by one, in heaven pale worlds appear,
And child and bird the gentle light forget,
As coldly in the field the rivulet
Sings, lingering, its song, and night is near.

The night-hawks, when the light beloved so well
Is so soon quenched upon the western sky,
Among the stars over the pasture fly

And weave and sink again to where they dwell.
And only they their cares at evening tell,
Save as from the dark vale the frogs reply
And, in the field beneath the starlight high,
The wakeful cow doth fret her nightly bell.

Woodchuck. So is it Eden, as in waited peace
The heart doth walk with fancy and recalls
Deep thoughts by the soul's flowers. Know ye, one grows
The other. Which the garden, which the rose?
Thought or the imaged earth? I know that not.
In the sequestered heart each begets each.

Rabbit. Alack, but not in mine. That is a child
Whose easy glances casual newness steals.
He stupor-captured in the meadow stands
Watching two butterflies. Tiring thereat,
And finding naught else new, he can but sit
And make toys from the quiet grass. A child
Of objectless good cheer, idle, not deep.

Fox. Art so of the stuff of heaven, weather's brother,
And hast thou, like the day-divining frog,
In heart the heart of all the world? Canst tell
How is the sky the universal tailor,
Makes of the morn the cloak to the gallant earth,
And of the eve that tearful garb and plain,

That men would wear for thinking? Dost know this?
Art earth's babe, pansy-nurtured Iamus?
Then tell the lore of hearts, and we shall heed
Until the Herdsman's flocks in heaven feed.

RABBIT. Expect naught now, nor earnestly exhort me,
Troubadour in vacant moment's garden,
To fine flight or the lyre. But, like eve's bird,
The covert-seeking whippoorwill, remote
From prying glance, I'll ply monotony
Till custom make it sweet, and tedium
Till the heart, exempted, sighs for it again.

SONG

Hast seen upon the wooded brink of night
The young moon peer with countenance all frail
And, distanced but a span, love's planet sail
In peerless company of neighbored light?
The field mounts up in silver to its height;
The inkèd wood beyond the meadow pale
Turns in strange shadow stooping to the vale
That hoods it from the moon's so gentle sight.

So, late, the goddess shone upon the west,
Lighting the cattle in the barnyard faint,
Where one, a moment's time, did make complaint
And all the others laid them to their rest.

'Twas then at cross-roads Hecate had addressed
Passers with strangeness, ere their sleep's constraint,
And burdened them with fancies wondrous quaint,
While that they nameless fared on nameless quest.

She was the tongue to the unsubstanced mind
Of shapes in night and many a thoughted stray
Which in the soul so foreignly convey
Message and tale in import ill-divined.
And they that journeyed, ere each one did find
The lighted room that met his ending way,
Paused on the pallid road in the dismay
For years uncharted and for purpose blind.

The moon in wonder stooped upon the trees
To bear her lamp to men in other lands.
The argent meadow slept beneath her hands,
And all the herds were healed of their unease.
Ah, who did see her then and with delight
Did not put off his least impoverishment?
So still she shone upon the vergèd night,
Moving so wanly in the hour's descent,
And touched all those that walked beneath her light
And answered them their hearts of troublement.

Fox. Now find we thus the Thracian's remedy
And the immemorial road to kindness. That's
Our way's end and the balancing of bills;

'Tis contract with most sweet oblivion,
The grace in the heart, which from life's muddy steps
Where one soul's for a little time above
Another in the slippery scale, being wiser,
Richer, more pliant to importunate hands,
And none's at top and none's at very bottom,
Doth lift men to the general circumstance
Of timelessness. Song is the wings thereto,
The sky-way to the last democracy.
Chide the too pantry, too domestic dream
Of what earth might be, she with homely sweet,
Thus laying hours in lavender and days
In garden-growing thyme, heals with the mien
Of decent peace our old disquietude.

PORCUPINE. See, the bee sails, a-wing on tardy errands,
And the field, golden and still, as she doth pass,
Sets at a kiss the term to all her flight.
It is e'en as thou sayst. A little mode
Of piecing thought to another thought makes man;
Wings make bird and bee; fleetness the deer.
And when night stoops, all down together lie.
May He that keeps the birds keep me.

RABBIT. So may He all the earth, while day hath fared
To evening and the hour the wood-thrush loves,

When the trees, gold-tipped of the old alchemist, sun,
Draw shadows over noon-forgetting fields
And over knolls the belling cows are leaving.
So, while the farmer with crooked hand to ear,
Silent attends that evening orison
And makes responsion sweet, calling across
The echo-running dell, we'll also sing,
Until from pasturage the herded hours
Swing-paced beneath the hillside seek their home.

THALIA. Who woos best the eve, dawn's kindlier twin
That dreams at vespers when the dawn's out running,
Let him make preface, then, in heart grown mild
To the mild hour and pardon of the day.

FOX. SONG

See a sleeping child or look
On night-flowers in the dusky garden ward.
Above the slumbered sundial trace the moon.
And where the quiet brook
Scarcely with mid-day laughter wakens noon,
Spy thou the trout
In prismed chancels and with cool accord
Weaving weak fins unhurried in and out.

Then the world at the moment waits,
Feign to make parley with the lingering heart,

And the Sinbad and old mariner in things,
Chance-passing, intimates
Sea-tales of dim, enchanted wanderings
To him, all dumb,
Who dreams of this far time and fairy part
That up the breeze of understanding come.

So one that, waking, ponders in the night
And marks the semblances of all the silent things,
Speeding from star to grave-yard with the wings
That owlish thought employs in muffled flight,
Hears in the hour twixt darkness and the light
A wind which riddles laden and which brings
Sphinx's reply to many wonderings
And words the morrow's wisdom cannot write.
For in the guard-hour and the silent time,
The world, like some free ship of farthest sail,
Draws to a timeless cadence and a rhyme
Which star and earth recite in mutual tale.
And men creep toward dawn with song sublime,
Till reason's drowsy lamps in slumber fail.

See a sleeping child or mark
Some late, still lanterner on midnight road.
Hear cowbells tossing ere the Persian bird,
Waked in the farmyard dark,
Hath hailed the ringing east or answer heard.
And from some mounting hill

Mark farmers far off hoeing, fair fields hoed,
And cattle grazing in the pasture still.

THALIA. To know, to grow, to likeness and the part
Of the part-passing universe, to be
What you are not and look with changeling's eyes
On what you are, at the chance-opened door
To peek in fleeting second, and to call
A few brief insights, a few sympathies,
Transient upon the windy moment, wisdom:
Therein is life's deception and its good.
But afternoon hath strayed to the evening way.
Our mask is through, our songs leave but the echo
Talking in restless leaves. A little work,
A little thought, a puzzlement of hours,
And evening reads the scriptures to them all.
So as a boy comes home across the fields,
Passes remarkless where at noon he paused
To see a hawk, hears the liturgic brook
And winds at tip in branches, and, when near,
Sees the house-lights and in the garden cool
His sister, as a wraith, among the sweet,
Closed blossoms walking and beneath the star
The west keeps; so find we the end of day.

WOODCHUCK. There's mildness in the attitude of earth.
Clover scarce nods, as the wind's breath lightly passes,

And the grass its thrice-long and ungainly shadows
Scarcely bestirs. In such fair influence
Even the fox might lave his disposition
In remorse and be the morrow gentler.
So mild the earth, the field in soft array,
Even the fox grows kinder with the day.

Fox. Here's hour for meditation. I think stones,
A stump, yea and these yokel pageanters
Might drink philosophy from eve, to hear
The obvious accents in the worded airs.
They blow from the west. That's wisdom's direction
And the place where hope lives matched with penitence.
To the wise they'll bring deep thoughts and to the simple
A demure and sober sweetness; decked in which,
As in old fashioned garlands, may this folk
Eke thus their lacking wisdom and from hence
Cease village spite and local petulance.

Thalia. Thus evening comes, the mirror to fair moods,
Day's better self, the hour that sews again
On the cloth and quiet needle-work of life
Where yester evening left it. Naught's done
In the choring day, but eve by eve, from shade
To other shade, fitting to past design
New tracing and the shapes the hours have taught,

Men weave the tapestry on, until, in years,
Fair forms, memorials lingering, and old hours,
Spinning their mingled meaning in the woof,
Leave a sweet garlandage of former flowers,
A gathered wisdom, and a love aloof.

EPILOGUE

The ghosts of the evening airs are in the wood
That grope sightless by trees with fingers dim
And still the troublous brook that pallid strays
And cold by its white lawn.
The nun, night, now, hushed in repentant hood,
Sings through the glade's retreat her muted hymn,
The prayer of holier life, the contrite praise
Of dream and lesson gone,
The gentle thanks welling in heart withdrawn.

And lo! in a thousand paths of questing light
Fireflies most swiftly o'er the Stygian place
Bear and return the braziers of their breath,
And the flames that fret the year
And May-fit in the feverish mind of night
Hither illume and there a wakeful space,
As o'er still stones, mounded as twins of death,
Sink and appear
Strange sparks and winking dances far and near.

Soft from the vestured frontage of the shade,
Where dark the trees quench the swift-falling star,
A nightly wind that many a hill hath kissed,
Passing, flies silently.

To the wan field with wonder overlaid,
Telling of moonlit cliff and mountain far,
It passes in the wind-ways of the mist,
Ere that it flee,
Swift as a thought, on whispered errandry.

And the tree of night, whited beneath the moon,
All silent is, while, in the holy sky,
Scenes of frail stars and signs go mounting past.
And the glade, stilled now in sleep,
As more, more weary, more ensunk with swoon,
The fitful lamps weave in the treetops high,
Ceases from day's dream and desire at last,
And of its life doth keep
Naught but the love in smiling slumber deep.

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